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## **Arafat Dies at 75; No Successor Set; West Bank Burial**

**By JAMES BENNET  
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AMALLAH, West Bank, Thursday, Nov. 11 - Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader, died early Thursday morning in a Paris hospital, a French military spokesman announced.

Mr. Arafat, who was the symbol of the Palestinian revolution and aspiration for an independent state for some 40 years, died at about 3:30 a.m. Paris time of complications from an unknown disease after lingering in a coma for days, as his wife and closest aides struggled over his political and financial legacy.

Mr. Arafat will be buried in Ramallah, on the West Bank, in the Muqata, an old British fortress he used as his headquarters and where he spent the last three years confined to his compound by the Israelis.

His body will first be flown to Cairo for a memorial service on Friday, a ceremony most Arab and world leaders are expected to attend so that they do not have to pass through Israeli border controls. Then, Palestinian officials said, Mr. Arafat will be buried here later on Friday, near his headquarters, from which he was airlifted to a French hospital on Oct. 29.

Palestinian officials quickly confirmed the death of their leader as small groups gathered outside the Muqata in a reddish dawn to mourn his passing. Early Thursday, Tayeb Abdel Rahim, the secretary general of the presidency, confirmed the death and said that Mr. Arafat "planted the seeds of hope for his people."

"The Palestinian leadership mourns Yasir Arafat," he said.

"We mourn with our people, with the Arab nation, with the whole of humanity," he said, the loss of "the tutor, the leader, the son of Palestine, its symbol, the builder of its modern nationalism and the hero of its battle for freedom and independence."

As he finished, saying: "Glory to you, our leader," Mr. Rahim broke into tears.

Mr. Arafat died with the Palestinians still in a limbo of semistatehood, a final peace with the Israelis unachieved and a lingering intifada against Israel that has seen the deaths of thousands of Israelis and Palestinians over the last four years.

The Israelis regarded him as a terrorist and an obstacle to peace, but Mr. Arafat held all the power of the Palestinians in his hands - the presidency, the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization and of its largest movement, Fatah. But he groomed no

successor, and he kept many secrets to himself, including the full range of the billions of dollars in Palestinian assets held in many joint accounts under his name.

Jibril Rajoub, the national security adviser, said: "The Arafat era is over. But the loyalty and commitment to his march, connected to building the state and ending the occupation, are the responsibility of every Palestinian."

Mr. Rajoub, speaking on Al Jazeera television, then sent a further message to Palestinians, asking for stability. "The coming phase should be one of institutions and laws, working through existing institutions, whether strong or not," he said.

Under the rules of the Palestinian Authority, the speaker of the parliament, Rawhi Fattouh, will serve as acting president until new elections are held for the post within the next 60 days.

Saeb Erekat, a Palestinian minister, urged the United States to work with the Palestinians and with Israel to ensure that "free and fair elections" could take place.

Mr. Arafat's lingering death allowed his putative successors, most prominently Mahmoud Abbas, the secretary general of the P.L.O., and Ahmed Qurei, the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, to organize themselves. They are working in tandem, and are trying to reach out to other, younger Palestinians with more power and street credibility.

Mr. Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, is expected to take over the P.L.O. and Fatah, while Mr. Qurei, known as Abu Ala, will continue as prime minister but with more authority over the day-to-day running of government.

[The Associated Press reported Thursday that Mr. Abbas was elected chairman of the P.L.O. within hours of Mr. Arafat's death.]

But there is bound to be a struggle for the Palestinian leadership over time, with a younger generation of militants and reformers pressing for a larger voice in Palestinian affairs, and hard choices coming about whether to try to absorb militants like Hamas or to confront them and try to make peace with Israel.

Israel's president, Moshe Katsav, expressed hope that Mr. Arafat's death would allow his successors a fresh start with Israel, Agence France-Presse reported. "I hope that the new Palestinian leadership will take a new path with a view to putting an end to terrorism and violence, which would allow a resumption of negotiations," he said.

But Hamas said Mr. Arafat's death would only strengthen its resolve to keep up attacks against Israel, Reuters reported. "The loss of the great leader will increase our determination and steadfastness to continue jihad and resistance against the Zionist enemy until victory and liberation are achieved," it said.

Mr. Abbas and Mr. Qurei will have to move quickly to try to restore credibility in the Palestinians' tattered institutions and provide security on the streets.

Outside the Muqata, Khalik Rimawi, 21, said he had waited all night for news. "I wanted to be in solidarity with my president," he said, trembling. "With the loss of our president we lost all confidence and trust we might have for anyone who might come after him. He personally was the symbol of the Palestinians and the Palestinian cause, and when he spoke, it was as if the whole nation were speaking."

His friend, Muhammad al-Hamoud, also 21, works in a dairy. "I feel there is a big gap, an emptiness," he said. "We'll stay until they bury the president."

In Gaza City, hundreds of people took to the streets after the announcement of Mr. Arafat's death. Some shot volleys of gunfire into the air; others burned tires, and smoke filled the air. Hamas, which considers the Palestinian Authority illegitimate, offered its condolences.

Mr. Arafat's death came after Palestinian leaders spent much of Wednesday planning the succession in meetings in Ramallah.

There was a debate about whether to hold elections to replace Mr. Arafat as president of the authority within 60 days of his death, as the authority's basic law demands.

Some argued that an election would be too difficult and risky and might not be carried out in time, especially with Israeli troops intermittently occupying parts of the West Bank and Gaza. It would be better, they said, for the legislature, the Palestinian Legislative Council, to select a president instead.

But the leadership decided to follow the basic law and hold an election, said Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian legislator. American officials favor an election as the best way to establish legitimacy quickly, the State Department spokesman, Richard A. Boucher, said in Washington. He said Secretary of State Colin L. Powell spoke on Tuesday with Nabil Shaath, one of Mr. Arafat's aides, "about the situation as it was and what plans were being made."

President Bush said that with a new Palestinian leadership that asks for help in building a democratic, free society, "there will be an opening for peace."

When that happens, Mr. Bush said, "the United States of America will be more than willing to help build the institutions necessary for a free society to emerge so that the Palestinians can have their own state."

"The vision is of two states, a Palestinian state and Israel living side by side," he said, "and I think we've got a chance to do that, and I look forward to being involved in that process."

Mr. Abbas is expected to run for the presidency as the candidate of Fatah, the largest faction in the P.L.O., said Edward Abington, a former American diplomat and now a consultant to the Palestinian Authority. But Mr. Abbas may face strong challenges from more popular, militant candidates who may have the tacit support of groups like Hamas.

"Even if he wins with 60 percent of the vote," a senior Israeli official said, "and a Hamas-supported candidate gets 40 percent, do you think Hamas will then accept what he says?"

The Israeli government wanted Mr. Arafat to be buried in the Gaza Strip, far from Israel proper and the place where his father and sister are buried. But in the cabinet debate on Wednesday, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon asked if anyone, including the army and the intelligence agencies, objected to the Ramallah burial site. No one did, Israeli officials said.

Instead, there was agreement that the first request of Mr. Abbas as putative heir should be acceded to. An Israeli official said the Americans had urged the Israelis to accept Ramallah for Mr. Abbas's sake.

The Israeli Army will coordinate the burial plans, the cabinet decided, but will stay out of Ramallah. In a statement, the cabinet said: "The responsibility for maintaining security and public order in Ramallah during the funeral and after it falls on the Palestinians.""